Palestine: Islamophobia and resistance to the Israeli occupation

Middle East /

Monday, 18 November 2024 / **Louisa D**

'There was no such thing as Palestinians… They did not exist.' This statement by Golda Meir in 1969 is the essence of what, fifty years later, would lead to the genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza. Despite live media coverage by its victims and a solidarity movement organised in many countries, it has continued unabated for a year.

Anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia in the imperialist North, an ally of Israel, explains not only how consent to the genocide was created but also why the solidarity movement has not been on a mass scale. Anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia structure the consent to genocide

Genocide requires the dehumanisation of its victims. Israeli society is deeply racist towards Palestinians. Adherence to the Zionist project of colonisation requires this dehumanisation, which today is evolving into a widely shared feeling of genocide

The signs of this were visible before October 2023. Moreover, since 7 October, expressions of support for the Palestinians have been only very marginal in the demonstrations that began against Netanyahu and a reform of the Supreme Court and have continued for the release of the hostages.

It is this racist and supremacist dimension of Zionism that manufactures the consent to genocide abroad. In the discourse of the dominant classes, the struggle of the Palestinians is described as an expression of religious fanaticism and associated with international Islamist terrorism. The internalisation of a racial hierarchy enables Western countries to identify with the Israeli victims and, at the same time, make the murder of Palestinians invisible.

In this respect, Israeli bi-nationals benefit from repatriations and even tributes for those who died on 7 October, while Palestinian bi-nationals have the greatest difficulty escaping the massacres and repatriating their loved ones. And so, Israel and above all Netanyahu are supported not only by extreme right-wing regimes and far right regimes and parties, but also by all governments that see themselves in this culturalist interpretation of the 'war of civilisations', which is transposed into hostility towards Arabs, Muslims and those racialised as such. Systemic racism and a rise in Islamophobia common to the imperialist North have allowed such an alignment of discourse to take place instantly. Such is only possible because of our own colonial unthinking and the construction of the state on the ethnic homogenisation of the nation and supremacism.

Finally, the picture would not be complete without the Zionist government's misuse of the fight against anti-Semitism, which maintains that the resistance of the Palestinian people is not motivated by their persecution as a colonised people but by anti-Semitism. In serving as a blank cheque for other racist regimes, Israel exonerates each of them of any anti-Semitism and in return allows them, under the pretext of fighting anti-Semitism, to target Muslims. Moreover, following the theory of the 'new anti-Semitism', contemporary anti-Semitism is said to emanate from Arabs and is therefore 'imported'.

This discourse immediately places supporters of the Palestinian people in the camp of the enemies of the state, with the following fallacy: to support the Palestinian people would be to support terrorism against the Jews.

The erasure of the colonial dimension in favour of a civilisational discourse is echoed in the mainstream media, which have largely amplified it. The media treatment has dehumanised Palestinian lives, with the number of deaths put into perspective and the brutality of the Israeli offensive has been euphemised. Newsrooms have been forbidden from using terms that make visible the colonial context in which it takes place. The media also played a major role in demonising of the solidarity movement. It was accompanied by unabashed racist and

Islamophobic expression.

Islamophobia: cornerstone of repression of the French solidarity movement

State-sponsored Islamophobia in France, which has its own colonial history, combines perfectly with Israeli propaganda. This is precisely what happened during the anti-Semitism demonstration on 12 November 2023, in which the anti-Semitic French far right took part. In the appeal, the link was made between 'the Republic and the fight against anti-Semitism' and 'defence of secularism in the face of Islamism'. Very quickly, the attacks of 7 October were compared to the Bataclan attacks and the racist vocabulary of savagery was used to characterise Palestinian resistance.

While the racialised popular classes were quick to mobilise, state repression took a turn against any form of expression of support. General bans on demonstrations were motivated by the risk of anti-Semitic remarks during demonstrations and expressions of support for Hamas. It was this expression by Muslims and generations of racialised people from post-colonial immigration that the ruling class first sought to make invisible in the public arena by presenting it as an inherent threat to public order.

The imposition of the Israeli narrative had an impact on the solidarity movement. It was structured in conjunction with anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggles, and the emergence of Urgence Palestine, formed around Palestinians, enabled more radical demands to be made; at the same time, the historic front of support organisations fractured over the condemnation of Hamas. This may explain why the solidarity movement found itself more easily criminalised, because it was more isolated. This criminalisation was particularly strong in France, where prosecutors were asked to respond 'firmly and quickly' to anti-Semitism and apologies for terrorism in a total confusion between denouncing the crimes of the Israeli state and terrorism. The autonomy of the offence of apology for terrorism, which is no longer solely covered by the law on freedom of the press, has served as a basis for immediate appearance procedures. There were already more than 600 prosecutions for apology for terrorism in April, with a maximum sentence of seven years' imprisonment.

A large-scale crackdown targeted mosques: several imams and heads of places of worship had their residence permits withdrawn and were deported because of remarks made in support of the Palestinian people. The most high-profile case was that of Abdourahman Ridouane, president of the Pessac mosque, who is due to be expelled after his appeal to the Council of State was rejected. This crackdown is obviously part of a more widespread attack by the state on organised Muslim cultural communities (the Pessac mosque had already been the subject of four attempts at administrative closure). Another example is Imam Ismaïl of the Bleuets mosque, who had to withdraw to avoid closure. The direct effect of this offensive is the destruction of communities and the demobilisation of people politicised through Islam. It has been greatly facilitated by the dissolutions of many anti-Islamophobia groups in recent years.

Palestinian voices and their allies have been intimidated, in particular Mariam Abu Daqqa, who has been expelled, Rima Hassan, who has been subjected to violent harassment, and Elias d'Imzalène, a member of Perspectives musulmanes, who is about to be tried for apology for terrorism after having taken up the Intifada slogan.

Because it denounces genocide and has refused to condemn armed resistance, la France insoumise (LFI) has been the target of an unprecedented attack designed to discredit it. The smear campaign combining accusations of anti-Semitism and clientelism towards pro-Palestinian voters was undeniably racist and Islamophobic because it was based on the following logic: only this clientelism towards voters racialised as Arabs and Muslims could explain LFI's support for the Palestinian people (and therefore only other Arabs could have empathy for the Palestinians); and criticism of Israel can only be explained by anti-Semitism and not by real support for the Palestinians' anti-colonial struggle.

Lastly, the French media's approach was eminently racist and Islamophobic and was denounced as such by the association of anti-racist journalists. The structuring Islamophobia in France has encouraged the acceptance of this level of repression in society against pro-Palestinian supporters with patterns of domination specific to racist oppression.

Abroad, mobilisation constrained by racism

This observation of an increase in the level of repression against the pro-Palestinian solidarity movement can be extended to most of the imperialist countries allied with Israel: obstacles to the right to demonstrate, harassment and defamation of supporters, control of public expression, cancellation of cultural events, dismissals, criminalisation, stigmatisation of foreigners and so on. Palestinians in the diaspora have been particularly targeted. There were similar dynamics: a link with anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles, in particular due to the strong participation of racialised people, and pro-Palestinian activism perceived as threatening and, by default, anti-Semitic. Above all, there has been a sharp increase in Islamophobic acts (hate speech, stigmatisation, attacks on places of worship, but also physical violence and murders).

In Germany, censorship of the solidarity movement is very strong because of support for Israel, described as a 'reason of state'. State racism has developed around the belief that anti-Semitism is imported by foreigners of the Muslim faith. Spain and Britain are exceptions, with a high level of mobilisation due to widespread public support for Palestine. The unconditional support of the British political class for Israel was offset by the strong mobilising role of Muslim and Palestinian community organisations. The university occupation movement that began in the United States had the potential to change the balance of power. Here too, the students mobilised were intimidated and defamed, accused of anti-Semitism and complacency towards Hamas.

While these mobilisations have been significant in places, they have not been able to sufficiently influence the support of the ruling classes for Israel, even if 'unconditional' support is now more timid. By importing the rhetoric of a civilisational conflict in which Israel is seen as a Western bastion against the Islamic threat, the ruling classes are using the expression of support for the Palestinian resistance to target Arabs and Muslims.

In the space of a year, we can take stock of an international mobilisation that has failed to rise above the ceiling of anti-Arab racism and a profound contempt for Palestinian lives. This racist portrayal of the Palestinian experience is not new, nor is the criminalisation of their support or the conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. On the other hand, unconditional alignment with Israeli propaganda has marked acceleration in general trend towards fascism, fuelled by a normalisation of the dehumanisation of Arabs and a deepening of authoritarianism. In this, we bear a collective responsibility to look into the mirror held up to us by Israel.

If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of *International Viewpoint*. Simply follow this link: Donate then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of this article for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.

En visitant notre site Internet, vous pourrez télécharger ces documents :

- , (PDF - 916 KiB)